SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE TO STUDY FIRE SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAMS

REPORT TO THE 1983 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA 1984 SESSION

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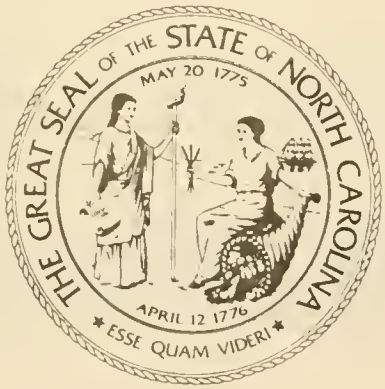

REPORT TO THE 1983 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA 1984 SESSION

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BACKGROUND

The Special Legislative Committee to Study Fire Service Training Programs ("Committee") was established by Section 20 of Chapter 761 of the 1983 Session Laws. (See Attachment A.) The Committee was composed of four members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, four members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, and four representatives of the Emergency Services Community. The Speaker appointed Representative John B. Gillam, III as one cochairman and the Lieutenant Governor appointed Dr. John L. Tart as the other cochairman. The other members of the Committee were: Representative Edward C. Bowen, Representative Daniel H. DeVane, Representative Ray Fletcher, Mr. Carroll Hemphill, Mr. H. T. Taylor, Mr. Gary Carter, Mr. Gordon Joyner, Mr. Wayne Brower, Mr. Bobby Joyner, and Mr. Horace Moore. (For a complete list of Committee membership see Attachment B.) The Committee Counsel and Committee Clerk were provided by the Legislative Services Office.

The Committee, and its directed study, were the results of hearings held by a subcommittee of the Joint Appropriations Committee, chaired by Representative Jeff H. Enloe, Jr., which attempted to determine whether there was duplication in the training services provided by the various state agencies involved to the paid and volunteer fire service and rescue workers of North Carolina. It was found that it would cost the state more than $500,000,000 to pay for the services presently provided by

the more than 1300 volunteer fire companies and the more than 500 volunteer rescue squads that provide property and life protection services to the citizens of North Carolina.

PROCEEDINGS

The Special Legislative Committee to Study Fire Service Training Programs ("Committee") held two working meetings and four public hearings. The two working meetings, at which the study's direction was set and at which the final report was formulated and approved were held in the Legislative Building in Raleigh. The four public hearings, which were attended by more than 400 people and at which more than 100 people made presentations, were held on January 9, 1984 in Bethel, North Carolina; on January 10, 1984 in Clinton, North Carolina; on January 23, 1984 in Sanford, North Carolina; and on May 14, 1984 in Asheville, North Carolina. (For details of these meetings see the minutes and proceedings prepared by the Committee Clerk and placed on file in the Legislative Library.)

At the first meeting, the Committee heard from representatives of the 14-state departments and agencies that are involved in the training of fire and rescue personnel in North Carolina. The Committee also set the scope of the study. The Committee recognized that the subject of fire and rescue training had been studied several times in recent years (including hearings conducted by a subcommittee of the Joint Appropriations Committee during the 1983 session of the General Assembly); however, those studies focused on the problems of duplication of delivery of training programs from the perspective of the state agencies involved in the light of cost containment. This study was designed to consider the input of the recipients of the

training--the paid and volunteer firefighters and rescue personnel--about any problems they identified and any solutions they might offer concerning the improvement of the delivery of those training services.

The Committee has considered and deliberated over all of the oral and written presentations made by the firefighters and rescue personnel in reaching its conclusions and making its recommendations. In order to insure the widest dissemination of the concerns of the Committee and to solicit attendance at the scheduled public hearings or written submissions, the Committee mailed a notification to all 1300+ paid and volunteer fire departments in the state, and through the North Carolina Association of Rescue Squads to the 500+ rescue squads in the state. In addition, the newspapers and electronic media were notified of the study through the Capitol press corps, the wire services, and direct mailings to the media outlets in the areas of the state where the public hearings were held.

The Committee established rules for the conduct of the public hearings which insured that all persons wanting to present an oral statement to the Committee had an opportunity to do so. All participants at the public hearings were urged to submit written comments in addition to oral remarks to allow for study by the Committee. Verbatim and summary proceedings of all hearings were prepared by the Committee Clerk and submitted to the Committee for study before making its findings and recommendations.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SHORT TERM (1984-1985)

Fire Service Training:

The Committee finds that the agencies that are offering the fire service training to the volunteer fire companies (chiefly, the Department of Community Colleges through the local Community Colleges and Technical Institutes and the Department of Insurance through the Fire and Rescue Training Division) are doing a commendable job. The Committee finds that there is not an excessive amount of duplication of courses of instruction offered to the fire service personnel by the state agencies. In general, the Community Colleges provide the basic instruction such as use of basic firefighting equipment and apparatus and basic firefighting theory and technique. The Department of Insurance, with its staff of technical experts provides specialized training on advanced techniques of fighting difficult fires involving such things as hazardous substances and highly flamable chemicals and some of the newest apparatus that may not be available to every fire company.

The vast majority of the people commenting to the Committee were pleased with the services provided by the Department of Community Colleges. The major criticisms of the Community Colleges were that the part-time instructors could be better teachers--attracted by adequate salaries and monitored through a more vigorous certification and training process.

Also, it was noted that the Department of Community Colleges was criticized for not having enough equipment for use in practical exercises.

The Committee recommends that the Department of Community Colleges continue to be the agency responsible for the basic training of all fire and rescue service personnel and that the Department of Insurance continue to provide the advanced training to fire service personnel.

The Committee recommends that the General Assembly appropriate funds to allow the Community Colleges to pay the part-time fire instructors a salary, uniform throughout the state, so that they can take the time to train for their roles as teachers and prepare for the courses they are to teach. (See Attachment C.)

The Committee recommends that the General Assembly appropriate funds so that the Department of Community Colleges could purchase equipment in order that adequate supplies would be available to augment the local fire company's equipment at practical exercises. (See Attachment D.)

The Committee recommends that the nine Regional Fire Service Coordinators have increased travel budgets to allow them to visit all of the community colleges and technical institutes on a regular basis to monitor the progress of the various classes given and to monitor the performance of instructors. (See Attachment E.)

The vast majority of the people commenting to the Committee were pleased with services provided by the Department of

Insurance, Fire and Rescue Training Division. The major criticism of the Department of Insurance was that there was too long a wait between a request for training and the class actually being conducted. In some cases, as long as six months passed between a request and a class, due to the limited manpower in the Training Division.

The Committee recommends that the General Assembly appropriate funds to increase the size of the Fire and Rescue Training Division from its present size of nine field training personnel to at least 12 field training personnel so that there would not be an inordinate delay between the request for training and the presentation of the requested class. (See Attachment F.)

The Committee finds the North Carolina State Fire Commission is not now adequately funded to continue its statutorily mandated functions which include "to increase the professional skills of fire protection and fire-fighting personnel," "to establish voluntary minimum professional qualifications for all levels of fire service personnel," "to recommend legislation concerning fire prevention and control," and "to serve as a central office for the collection and dissemination of information relative to fire service activities and programs in State government." (See G.S. 143B-482.)

The Committee recommends that the General Assembly appropriate the $151,000 requested by the North Carolina State Fire Commission for increased staff and operating expenses. (See Attachment G.)

The Committee finds that due to inadequate funding the North Carolina State Fire Commission has not been complying with its statutory duty (prescribed by G.S. 143B-482 (14a)) of collecting and disseminating information on fire service training programs. The Fire Commission should collect training schedules from all agencies of state government and publish a quarterly schedule of training programs and their locations so that fire companies can better coordinate and attend training classes in their area.

The Committee recommends that the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations inquire into the reasons why the North Carolina State Fire Commission has not been able to perform its statutory duties.

The Committee finds that there is no one source or contact point with the various state agencies from which fire service personnel can receive information about services and support offered by the state agencies.

The Committee recommends that there be established a single statewide toll free telephone number as a clearing house for fire service information. (See Attachment H.)

SHORT TERM (1984-1985)

Rescue Services:

The Committee finds that G.S. 131E-155(5) requires the Department of Human Resources to mandate a training program for rescue personnel "at least equal to the National Standard Training Program for emergency medical technicians as defined by the United States Department of Transportation" and that G.S. 131E-159 requires the Department of Human Resources to test and certify rescue personnel who have met the qualifications set by the North Carolina Medical Care Commission. The rules require a minimum of 81 hours (110 hours by 1985) of instruction (71 hours of instruction and ten hours of practical experience) before a rescue worker is eligible for examination and certification. The main providers of this instruction are the local community colleges and technical institutes which require completion of their established courses of instruction before an applicant is included on the eligibility list and can be examined for certification. While the rules establish a minimum number of hours, no maximum number of hours is set and the length of the course of study varies significantly (from 88 hours to 140 hours) from one local institution to another.

The Committee recommends that a maximum number of hours be established and enforced by the Department of Community Colleges to create uniformity in the course of instruction taught at the various community colleges and technical institutes. (See Attachment I.)

The Committee finds that, at present, a rescue worker is required to complete 20 hours of instruction and successfully complete a six station practical examination every two years to be recertified. The course work is given by a qualified instructor at a local community college or technical institute and the examination is given either at a central testing point or if there are 15 or more squad members to be tested and adequate facilities at the local squad by evaluators selected by the Office of Emergency Medical Services, Division of Facilities Services, Department of Human Resources. Concurrent with that training requirement for recertification, all rescue workers must attend "a minimum of 36 hours of training and meetings" (G.S. 118-39) in each calendar year as certified by the Secretary of the North Carolina Association of Rescue Squads, Inc. to the State Auditor, in order to be eligible to participate in the North Carolina Firemen's and Rescue Squad Workers' Pension Fund.

The Committee recommends that the North Carolina Medical Care Commission adopt recertification standards which would require an annual 36-hour program of continuing education (at least 18 hours of which must be medical in content) to be approved and monitored by the Office of Emergency Medical Services and to be conducted by qualified instructors through local community colleges. The completion of this program would be sufficient for recertification as an emergency medical service provider and qualify the attendee as a member of the Pension Fund. (See Attachment J.)

LONG TERM (1985-Future)

The Committee finds that, in the long term (1985 and beyond), the only way that significant cost savings can be realized is by the consolidation of all fire and rescue service policy making, planning, and monitoring functions under a single regulatory agency in state government. This agency should be a new Division of Emergency Services in the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety and should be made up of the current North Carolina State Fire Commission, the Division of Emergency Management, the Office of Emergency Medical Services, and the Fire and Rescue Training Division. The teaching of basic fire and rescue service courses should remain the function of the Department of Community Colleges.

The Committee recommends that the affected departments and agencies be directed to report to the 1985 General Assembly concerning the establishment of a new Division of Emergency Services in the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. (See Attachment K.)

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the meetings held by the Special Legislative Committee to Study Fire Service Training Programs ("Committee") at which the input from the state agencies providing training programs to the state's fire and rescue workers and the input from the state's fire and rescue workers was received, the Committee was able to reach certain conclusions about the subject matter of the study.

The Committee concluded that there was no excessive overlap of services provided by the state agencies. Where there was some commonality between subjects taught, by the Department of Insurance and the Department of Community Colleges for example, the difference in approach to the subject matter served to enhance and reinforce the studies of the recipient firefighters and rescue squad members.

The Committee found that, in light of the cost to the state of providing the same services now provided by the volunteer fire and rescue workers (estimated at $500,000,000) per year), and in light of the high level of services provided by the fire and rescue workers, that the cost of the various fire and rescue training programs is a reasonable investment in the protection of life and property in this state.

The Committee found that, in the short term, the complaints of fire fighters concerning the length of time it takes to schedule and receive training from the Department of Insurance could be resolved by adding field personnel to the Fire and

Rescue Training Division. The complaints of the firefighters concerning the quality of instructors at the local community colleges and technical institutes could be resolved by providing the regional coordinators in the Department of Community Colleges with travel allowances that would permit them to more closely monitor the performance of the instructors. The complaints of firefighters concerning record keeping on their attendance at drills and meetings (necessary for pension eligibility certification), concerning voluntary and then mandated skill certification to develop and increase the professionalism of all fire companies, and concerning the better coordination of and dissemination of information about the training programs at various times and places, could all be resolved through the funding and manning the North Carolina State Fire Commission at a level that would allow it to meet its already established statutory mandates.

The Committee found that, in the short term, the complaints of the rescue workers concerning the length of the course of study required by some of the local community colleges and technical institutes and concerning the requirements for recertification testing could be resolved by regulations being promulgated by the Department of Community Colleges to set maximum as well as minimum requirement for programs leading to eligibility for certification and recertification and to allow qualified instructors to recertify emergency medical service providers without the need for centralized testing.

The Committee concluded that, in the long term, significant cost savings could be realized by consolidating all agencies providing fire and rescue services except the delivery of training under one regulatory agency of state government, the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, Division of Emergency Services so that existing laws can be carried out in an efficient and economic manner.

Finally, the Committee concluded that the state's fire and rescue workers should be commended for their commitment to the training needed to maintain their expertise and professionalism which provide the citizens of North Carolina with the finest fire and rescue services available anywhere.

Attachment A

1983 SESSION LAWS, C. 761

-----SPECIAL STUDY ON FIRE SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Sec. 20. There is created the Special Legislative Committee to Study Fire Service Training Programs. The Committee shall consist of four members appointed by the Speaker of the House, four members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, and four representatives of the Emergency Services Community. The representatives of the Emergency Services Community shall be the Executive Secretary of the North Carolina Association of Rescue Squads, the Executive Secretary of the North Carolina Association of Fire Chiefs, the North Carolina Representative to the National Volunteer Fire Council, and the Executive Secretary of the North Carolina Firemen's Association. Cochairmen shall be selected by the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor.

Members of the Committee who are legislators shall be reimbursed for travel and subsistence expenses at the rates set out in G.S. 120-3.1. Members of the Committee who are not officers or employees of the State shall receive per diem and necessary travel and subsistence expenses in accordance with the provisions of G.S. 138-5. Members of the Commission who are officials or employees of the State shall receive travel reimbursement at the rate set forth in G.S. 138-6. All expenses of the Committee shall be paid from funds appropriated to the General Assembly Reserve for Contingencies. The Legislative Services Officer shall provide staff to the Committee.

The Committee shall:

(1) Study and review current statutory responsibilities of the State departments and agencies involved in the delivery of fire and rescue training programs;

(2) Analyze the total costs of these State programs; and

(3) Study and review any other pertinent data.

The Committee shall prepare a final written report to the 1984 General Assembly which shall include a detailed proposal on a more effective and coordinated delivery of State services to the fire and emergency services community throughout the State and shall include budgetary changes and statutory changes as needed to effectuate the proposal.

Attachment B

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Attachment C

-----FIRE INSTRUCTORS SALARIES.

Sec. _____. The Department of Community Colleges shall establish a statewide program for the payment of qualified fire instructors. This program shall provide for payment on the basis of experience as a fire instructor and shall provide for remuneration on the basis of merit as a teacher based on frequent monitoring of classes and standardized evaluations by students and regional coordinators. The Department of Community Colleges shall report to the 1985 General Assembly as to compliance with this section and to request funds to implement this program.

Attachment D

-----FIRE EQUIPMENT SURVEY.

Sec. _____. The Department of Community Colleges shall, in conjunction with the North Carolina State Fire Commission, conduct an inventory of all supplies and equipment available to be used by fire instructors in conducting fire service training programs. The Department of Community Colleges shall determine the additional supplies and equipment needed, on a statewide and or regional basis, to provide that all firefighters taking instruction will have hands-on experience with the supplies and equipment during exercises. The Department of Community Colleges shall report to the 1985 General Assembly as to compliance with this section and to request funds to implement its provisions.

Attachment E

-----FIRE SERVICE COORDINATORS.

Sec. _____. The Department of Community Colleges shall transfer from funds already available to the Department sufficient travel funds so that the nine Regional Fire service Coordinators can monitor all fire service training programs in their regions on a regular and continuous basis. The Department of Community Colleges may request increased funding to implement the provisions of this section from the 1985 General Assembly.

Attachment F

-----FIRE AND RESCUE TRAINING DIVISION.

Sec. _____. The Department of Insurance shall increase the size of the Fire and Rescue Training Division from its present size of nine field training personnel to 12 field training personnel with additional support personnel and supplies, equipment, and other necessary expenses. The Department of Insurance shall request increased funding to implement this section from the 1985 General Assembly.

Attachment G

-----NORTH CAROLINA STATE FIRE COMMISSION.

Sec. _____There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety the sum of one hundred fifty-one thousand dollars ($151,000) for the fiscal year 1984-85 to provide additional staff for the North Carolina State Fire Commission.

Attachment H

-----STATEWIDE FIRE SERVICE INFORMATION TELEPHONE LINE.

Sec. _____. The North Carolina State Fire Commission shall establish, not later than January 1, 1985, a statewide toll free telephone number to serve as a clearing house for fire service information.

Attachment I

-----MAXIMUM HOURS FOR E.M.T. TRAINING

Sec. _____. The Department of Community Colleges shall establish and enforce a maximum number of hours of instruction and practical experience above which no local institution may require before an applicant for certification as an emergency medical provider shall be included on the eligibility list for testing as an emergency medical technician. The Department of Community Colleges shall implement the requirements of this section not later than January 1, 1985.

Attachment J

-----RESCUE WORKER RECERTIFICATION.

Sec. _____. The North Carolina Medical Care Commission shall adopt new standards for the recertification of emergency medical care providers. These standards shall require not more than 36 hours of continuing education annually, provide for monitoring of the continuing education by the Office of Emergency Services, Department of Human Resources, and provide that the qualified instructors teaching the continuing education shall determine whether or not the recertification shall be granted.

Attachment K

-----DIVISION OF EMERGENCY SERVICES.

Sec. _____. The Departments of Crime Control and Public Safety, Human Resources, and Insurance shall together report, not later than January 31, 1985, to the 1985 General Assembly on the statutory and regulatory changes needed to create a new Division of Emergency Services within the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety to be made up of the North Carolina State Fire Commission, the Division of Emergency Management, the Office of Emergency Medical Services, and the Fire and Rescue Training Division. Transfers shall be Type I transfers, as authorized by G.S. 143A-6, and shall be implemented no later than January 1, 1986.